

I am now watching carefully as we struggle to come to the end of this session, and know that one of the bills that is lying there waiting to be passed is the Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1998 on which the former Senator, Leader Dole, worked so hard.

This legislation addresses the last remaining barrier to true independence for individuals with disabilities. We must act now. For years, both here and in Vermont, individuals with disabilities have said to me, "Senator Jeffords, I want to work. But I cannot afford to."

It took me a while to fully understand and appreciate what they were saying. Simply put, the current system of cash payments and health care coverage in the Social Security Act do not encourage individuals with disabilities to work, or to work to their full potential. Common sense is on our side with regard to Social Security reform. Our country has succeeded in providing Federal and State support for children and adults with disabilities through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and recently the Work Incentives Act of 1998.

But although our Nation has shown its commitment to prepare children and adults with disabilities for work—in fact, in the work incentive bill I referred to, we have the Rehabilitation Act reauthorization there; we put it in the Workforce Act to bring closure, to bring together all of these bills that help people to work—we have conditions that, unfortunately, do not allow or encourage those individuals with disabilities to work.

If someone told you, "Look, you can work, but if you earn over \$500 monthly, in 12 months"—that is \$6,000 a year—"your health insurance will stop, unless you pay for it yourself," after a period of time would you work and exceed those thresholds? I doubt it.

If someone told you, "We will cover the cost of personal assistance services and prescription drugs that you need in order to work, but you cannot have more than \$2,000 in assets, or accumulate more than \$2,000 in assets," do these conditions appear to help individuals be self-sufficient? Clearly not.

The facts are on the side of those of us who want to pass the Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1998. We want it included in the omnibus appropriations bill, and there is great effort going on to accomplish that.

There are 7.5 million individuals with disabilities who receive cash payments from the Social Security Administration and receive health insurance coverage through Medicare or Medicaid. According to GAO, in 1996 cash payments were about \$1.21 billion weekly. These payments do not include payments made under Medicare or Medicaid. If these payments are factored in, the costs exceed \$70 billion annually.

It has been estimated that the number of Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities increased 83 percent

between 1989 and 1997, and this number will continue to grow by a rate of about 3 to 6 percent a year.

If just 1 percent of these beneficiaries were to become successfully employed, savings in cash payments would total \$3.5 billion over their lifetime for that 1 percent. The Work Incentives Improvement Act is a credible, viable solution in terms of both fiscal responsibility and personal responsibility.

The Work Incentives Improvement Act gives States discretion to offer health care benefits to individuals with disabilities on the Social Security rolls when their earned income exceeds that now in the Social Security Act. As a result, more of these individuals will work and will work for more hours.

The legislation allows States to impose cost-sharing obligations on these individuals. The legislation would cost \$200 million a year over a 5-year period—a small price to pay when you consider this legislation has a potential to turn 8 million individuals into taxpayers. There ought to be a substantial gain—no cost. The legislation includes offsets to pay for it.

The legislation includes Representative BUNNING's "Ticket to Work" bill that will give people with disabilities more choices when they need job training before going to work.

All major disabilities organizations support the Work Incentives Improvement Act but will not support the enactment of the "Ticket to Work" alone. They have to come together.

Many of our colleagues in the administration support this legislation. I especially want to thank my friend Senator GRASSLEY for his support in these important last weeks.

The insurance industry fully supports the legislation. The Work Incentives Improvement Act will help reduce the \$70 billion annual drain on the budget caused by 8 million individuals with disabilities, many of whom want to work but do not because of their fear of the loss of access to health care.

At this point we cannot say, again, we will try to get something through next Congress. We cannot hide behind excuses. We must pass the Work Incentives Improvement Act now. This is a special time. The momentum is with us. People with disabilities expect us to deliver now. They want to be free to go to work.

If we do, the lives of millions of Americans will be transformed, both disabled and nondisabled Americans. Individuals with disabilities will work and pay taxes. They will experience the true meaning of personal dignity, freedom, independence, and choices. Their family members and friends will be freed from caretaking responsibilities and reenter the workforce or expand their work hours. Decisions about the quality of life and living circumstances of an individual with disabilities will no longer be made for that individual but will be made by and with that individual.

The only down side to the Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1998 is it

has taken us so long to get to this precious moment. Let's make it count. Let us deliver, and let us deliver now.

Mr. President, I yield whatever time I have and I am now ready to proceed.

I make a point of order that a quorum is not present.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

REPORT OF AN AGREEMENT WITH THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA CONCERNING FISHERIES OFF THE COASTS OF THE UNITED STATES—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT—PM 162

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; referred jointly, pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 1823, to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

To the Congress of the United States:

In accordance with the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*), I transmit herewith an Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania extending the Agreement of November 12, 1992, Concerning Fisheries Off the Coasts of the United States, with annex, as extended ("the 1992 Agreement"). The present Agreement, which was effected by an exchange of notes in Washington on April 20, September 16 and September 17, 1998, extends the 1992 Agreement to December 31, 2001.

In light of the importance of our fisheries relationship with the Republic of Lithuania, I urge that the Congress give favorable consideration to this Agreement at an early date.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON.

THE WHITE HOUSE, October 14, 1998.